6-26-1936

Paul to Sam July 26, 1936

Paul Sargent

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Recommended Citation
Sargent, Paul, "Paul to Sam July 26, 1936" (1936). Letters and Correspondence. 11.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/paul_sargent_letters/11
P to S  July 26, 1936

Dear Sam,

Got your letter just now and as I did not have time in my last letter will write now.

It is still hot here, but not as bad as it was. Today is under 90 degrees, yesterday 104 degrees. We had a big rain last week-2 inches-but need that much every day for a week or so. It helped things a lot but too late to help early corn so much. Garden has begun to perk up. I have been planting a late garden, winter radishes, turnips, lettuce.

Man here this morning from Marion, Ind. Much interested in pictures and bought a sheep picture I made many years ago. He made me an offer of some stretched canvases made from a roll about 84 inches long. I don't know many feet long, 11 yards I guess. Said would stretch about 28 canvases 30X36, 25X30, 20X24. So I traded an old picture of mine for the canvas. He was getting the best end of bargain, but I need canvas.

Sold some pictures lately, paid my taxes, so now I sleep better. Use the balance to fix up the barn and buildings here before winter.

From what you say about the art teacher, I imagine she is one of those talkers but not doers. If she sees weak drawing, she should be able to tell you how to correct it. My guess is she does not know herself. Think I better send you my book on figure drawing by Vanderpool. He was my teacher at Art Inst. in figure drawing, and at that time was considered the best draughtsman of the figure in America. He could not paint much, for some reason I don't know. I am inclined to think he was color blind from a few sketches I saw of his.

Strength of drawing is gained by simplicity of seeing. Instead of seeing all the little wiggles of line in the whole length of it and draw the whole length first and put the slight variations on that long line-taking extra care not to see those variations larger than they are. Many students in school use a plumb line to get the up and down lines, gives a straight line by which to compare. Hold it up before figure and compare slopes with it also find the centre of gravity with it—the figure balances (standing over a certain point that can be found with plumb line.)
Block out figure with straight lines as you do landscape. That makes for strong drawing—angular outlines and disregard for curves, lower over emphasized makes a drawing look weak. When you see a straight line in figure fill on it and keep to the finish so far as possible. Weak drawing is too much noticed for small things—let the foundation be right in the big breadths and heights—then the small things will fall into place. And remember, always that there is nothing half so important in drawing as correct big proportions—the breadth and height.

The big planes of body must be correctly stated. The body or head lighted from front will have front in light and big side planes in shadow. Any turn of the body brings new planes into shadow or light. Learn these so you can draw them from memory. The big planes and secondary planes in their proper relations. All good drawing and painting is based on the correct proportions of big masses, and the right lighting of these planes. There is nothing that will help you more than memorizing these planes. Vanderpool explained them, and any book on figure drawing will give them.

I don’t know the artist illustrator you mention or his work.

Mr. Wolcott one day in painting class told me this. Draw the long lines of body or leg, then build the small knobs that project over it, or make indentations in it—but draw the big line first. So think of big proportions, big planes, and don’t bother about fingers and toes and features until all those more important things are right. Then when you put the small things in, don’t let them be so dark or light that they break up those big planes—keep them subdued in the whole, much more subdued than you will think proper for awhile, until you learn to apply the principle from habit.

I am working on a set of sketches in color for mural paintings for the Decatur Post Office, government art. I hardly expect to land anything but will get my name in the pot for maybe something later. It is a competition, some 50 artists competing. I did not hear of it in time to get started from scratch.
There are seven murals to be made and $7,000 will be paid for the whole. Will probably be divided among several. The subject is the general one of communication.

I have several pencil sketches in making. My idea is the whole development of the West, a pageant of the West, the movement of the stage as newer things came along. I took as my first panel (These are 4 panels 4X 20 ft, and three 7X 7 ½ ft.) the Indian camp getting ready to move, the horses and poles, children, squaws. Had Indian warriors on horses with spears. An Indian chief in full head dress standing looking back at the white man’s coming. Further to right close up are two buffalo and calf and two antelope, all running away to the west ahead of white man. All the foreground in one panel—the first. The animals of course are oblivious to the Indians. It represents the flight of those, what I guess is called and allegory. The other panels I haven’t worked out yet. The job is to crowd so many types of people and ideas into so few panels. I intend to bring in somewhere a horse thief, road agent being escorted to the nearest pole or wagon tongue to be executed. Also Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill and others, if they can be squeezed in. One of the square panels I think should have Indians making smoke signals as means of communication.

I found a picture of the Miles house. Ernest Freeeman has a negative he made himself and said I could get a print from it. He is making the print and it will be sent to you inside a week.

Guess I better close and get to town.

Would like to paint the ocean again. Think I could do better.

Paul